UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1997/NGO/88
1 April 1997

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-third session
Agenda item 10

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[27 March 1997]

Situation of human rights in Bahrain

1. The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organization in Bahrain, the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Bahrain (CDHRB), are most concerned about the human rights situation in that country. They wish in particular to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to events which have occurred in recent months, as a result of which the human rights situation has greatly deteriorated.

2. With the political, strategic and financial support of the Conference of Gulf States and of a number of Arab and western States (in particular the United States and the United Kingdom), the Bahraini authorities have had a free hand in stepping up repressive measures. These measures were directed especially against the popular movement for a constitutional State and, in a society already enduring numerous human rights violations, have sparked off clashes between citizens and riot police in the last three months.

A. Unfair trials

3. The number of iniquitous trials conducted by the State Security Court, which was set up to conduct summary trials of numerous political offenders, has increased dramatically in recent months. The number of divisions of this Court has been increased and several judges belonging to the ruling Al-Khalifa clan have been appointed to it. Its powers have also been increased by Decree-Law No. 10/1996, of 29 March 1996, authorizing it to pronounce death sentences.

4. On 1 July 1996, the Court sentenced to death three persons charged with involvement in the alleged arson of the Al-Zaiton restaurant, which would seem to indicate how it intends to use its newly-acquired powers. The Court sentenced three persons to death (Ali Ahmed Abdulla Alasfur, Yousit Hussain Abdulbadi, Ahmed Khalil Alkutab), four others (Khalil Ibrahim Abdulla Khames, Q. Khames Ali Qambar, Abdulla Ibrahim Abdulla Khames, Mohamed Rida Yaqub Alatar) to life imprisonment, and a minor less than 15 years old (Abdul-Aziz Hussain Abdubaal) to 15 years' imprisonment. The defence lawyers contested the legality of the procedure adopted, as the accused had been tortured during interrogation and the Court had based its verdict on the confessions extorted in this way. In addition, statements by numerous defence witnesses were disregarded by the judges.

5. After these arbitrary sentences had been pronounced, the defence attorneys submitted a petition to the Amir of Bahrain, Sheik Issa Al-Kalifa, contesting the verdict and urging him to exercise his authority to pardon the persons sentenced. The petition was sent to the Minister of Justice and to the Deputy Director of the Amirate Court, Sheik Ahmed Al-Kalifa, both of whom rejected it. The pronouncement of these sentences exacerbated the climate of anger prevailing throughout the country. Demonstrations were held in various places and were violently broken up. In the course of these events, one child was killed, a teenager died under torture, many persons were injured and dozens arrested and a state of siege was actually imposed in some places. Other verdicts reached by the State Security Court demonstrate just how iniquitous it is. On 8 July 1996, for example, four members of the Sh. Yassen Souar group were sentenced to three years' imprisonment for printing and distributing the Constitution (in the case of Sh. Yassen Souar himself) or for distributing anti-government pamphlets (in the case of the others).

B. Extrajudicial executions

6. The verdict reached on 1 July 1996 in the Al-Zaiton case was followed by a wave of spontaneous peaceful protest demonstrations on the island of Sitra (where the accused lived) and in other parts of the country. The riot police broke them up with unnecessary violence, causing several deaths, among them 17-year-old Ali Taher, who was hit by police bullets on 2 July. Three days later, his family learned that he had died in detention and the authorities refused to allow the body to be turned over to them for a proper Muslim burial. Ali was actually buried by the police in an unmarked grave.

C. Death under torture

7. Rape and torture of detainees have become everyday occurrences. The victims may be men, women or children of either sex. It is difficult to identify them precisely because they are completely cut off from the outside world. The most horrifying information which has filtered out of the prisons concerns the rapes committed by Mohamed Saed, a Pakistani, on the orders of Colonel Khaled Alwazan, himself acting on the instructions of General Ian Henderson, the commander of the Intelligence Services.

8. The security forces appear to have been allowed a free hand in using these tactics to discourage members of the opposition. In addition, the State Security Court treats confessions obtained under torture as evidence. These methods are used to get rid of the accused quickly in the most summary of proceedings. Finally, individuals committing acts of torture are not only covered by their superiors, but are also motivated by the prospect of promotion in the police or armed forces. Cases in point are those of the officers Adel Flafel and Khaled Alwazan.

9. Information received from the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Bahrain (CDHRB) names the following as being involved in the practice of torture: Lieutenant-Colonel Adel Flaifeel, responsible for torturing the most individuals, including dozens of political prisoners, some of them until they died, as in the case of Jameel Ali in 1981; Colonel Khaled Al-Wazan, responsible for the second largest number of acts of torture; Corporal Mohamed Saed (Pakistani) responsible for the largest number of rapes; members of the Supreme Security Committee (General Abdulla Almawda, General Atiatalla Alkhalifa, General Abdul Rahman Buali, General Mohamed Aldawadi and Colonel Adel Flaifel); senior members of the security and intelligence apparatus (Sheik Mohamed Khalifah Al-Khalifa, Minister of the Interior, Sheik Ibrahim Mohamed Al-Khalifa, and the team led by General Ian Henderson).

D. State of siege and arrests

10. In recent months, hundreds of people (men, women and children) have been arbitrarily arrested and detained. Most of these arrests were made during the week of peaceful civil disobedience (9-16 August) called by the opposition and during demonstrations in memory of victims of police brutality. In general during these operations, villages are surrounded, house-by-house searches are made, furniture is destroyed, luxury goods and money are stolen, people beaten up and some of them, including children, arrested.

E. Arbitrary detention

11. In order to bring pressure to bear on members of the opposition, the State Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Security Service (both commanded by the team of General Ian Henderson) follow a policy of family harassment. As a result, the wives and children of members of the pro-democracy movement are frequently arrested and taken hostage.

12. The Al-Jamri family is a prime example of totally unjustifiable reprisals against family members. Sheik Abdul-Amir Al-Jamri, a former Shariah Supreme Court Judge, and the members of his family have been constantly harassed since he joined the pro-democracy movement in the 1980s. He has himself been placed under house-arrest on several occasions. His elder son and son-in-law were accused of anti-government activities, severely tortured and sentenced to 10 years' and 7 years' imprisonment respectively in 1988. The village where Sheik Al-Jamri lives was surrounded by paramilitary police, who fired on the inhabitants, killing two persons and wounding many others. In 1996, his daughter and daughter-in-law were arrested, and were released only as a result of international pressure.

13. FIDH and CDHRB express their deep concern at these gross, flagrant and systematic violations of human rights and call on the Commission on Human Rights to take up the question of human rights in Bahrain.